

IDEAS AT *Work*

COMPUTERS/HILLEL SEGAL

'Smart Notes' clever, but also disappointing

I'm addicted to "Post-it Notes," those small yellow slips of paper made by 3M that stick to almost anything. I keep a whole supply handy, in many different sizes, and use them constantly for notes to myself and others in my office.

Now, an amazing electronic version is available for use with IBM PCs and PC-compatible personal computers. Called "Smart Notes," it allows you to "attach" a colored note to virtually anything that appears on your computer screen. Every time you use the same document or access the same area on your screen, the note is available for your viewing.

Introduced earlier this year, this \$83.70 piece of clever software has already become a best-seller. I haven't heard many opinions about Smart Notes from users. But reviewers in the trade press appear to have jumped on the bandwagon and become part of the cheering section for Personics Corp., Concord, Mass., the company that invented the program.

Unlike other reviewers, however, I was disappointed after attempting to use the program for my daily work, mainly because one incredibly simple function was missing. When you are working with a document or a screen of information that has a Smart Note attached to it, the note does not appear unless you ask for it.

If you remember that a screen has a note that you want to view, you must hit the Ctrl-F6 key combination — pressing the F6 function key while holding down the Control key — in order to see the note.

That's kind of ridiculous. You have to remember there is a note in order to see it, when the whole purpose of having a note in the first place is to help you remember! And if you are preparing a document for someone else, how do they know that the note is there in order to ask for it?

Can you imagine how unsuccessful the original Post-it Notes would have been if they were invisible and you had to remember to wave your hand a special way in front of

them in order to see them?

Let's pretend, however, that the developers will be wise enough to change the program quickly, and that the next version will include the currently missing feature. Then, we've got something that could be used every day.

Here are some great potential uses of the program for business-office situations:

- ✓ Attach notes to your file directories, highlighting which files have important information. This reduces search time if you have dozens or hundreds of files on your hard disk.

- ✓ Attach notes to individual cells of spreadsheets to record comments or underlying assumptions. "Note sales up in 4th Qtr."

- ✓ Attach notes to word processing documents with reminders to insert additional information later. "Verify unit price of widgets."

- ✓ Attach notes with operating instructions for subordinates, or notes from subordinates to the boss. "Hey boss, this needs your attention."

Could any of these applications be used effectively by your office now, before Personics gets around to improving the current version?

Maybe. There is one instance when the notes appear on your computer screen without your having to ask for them. Whenever you press the "PgUp" or "PgDn" key on the keyboard, the notes appear. If, in using your application software — word processing program, data-base program, etc. — you use this function all the time anyway, you're in luck. In this case, it's almost as if the notes appeared without your asking for them. This only works, however, within that software. You still have to specifically ask for the notes by pressing a special key combination if you're looking for notes attached to file directories or other programs.

The bottom line: As it now stands, Smart Notes does not appear to be worth the purchase price nor the time and effort necessary to add notes to your files.



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